An Interview with W. Kent Cooper

6 December 1999

Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Zachary M. Schrag

Transcribed by Mr. Schrag

Mr. Cooper requested that two comments not be shared with researchers until his death. Those comments have been redacted from this transcript, so this transcript may be shared with researchers immediately.

Schrag: Zachary Schrag is interviewing Kent Cooper. It is December 6, 1999, a little past two o’clock. We are at his office, and studio, in Washington, D.C. So, you were going to give me some general comments, about the nature of your comments. You said it was a very personal view.

Cooper: At the time that all of this was going on, there was a major battle going on in Washington, over highways, and freeways, and Interstates, and mass transit. One of the pivotal players, perhaps the most pivotal, was Fritz Gutheim. Do you know that name?

Schrag: I certainly know the name. And he was staff representative for the Bible Committee, I know that. And he later became a member of the advisory board of the NCTA. What I’m less clear on was his exact role. I must say that there are some very prominent names on the advisory board of the NCTA and it’s never been quite clear to me how much power that board had.

Cooper: Fritz was a power. He later has written a history of the Potomac valley and that whole thing as another act of a committee of Congress. I’ve forgotten the details. I’ve got the report, but I don’t carry the

details in my head. Fritz was one of the urbanists of that time that was extremely well known. And formed what later became the Council of Governments. As I say this, I'm trying to recall what in heaven's name the name of that organization was. It was the metropolitan —

Schrag: Washington Research Center?

Cooper: Something like that. Of which he was chairman. I knew Fritz through Eero. I don't think Fritz went through Cranbrook, but I think he was a key urbanist. He may have come from Detroit. I'm not sure of that at all. Anyway, when I came down here in 1958, to do the Dulles Airport project as Eero's representative here, Fritz glommed onto me immediately and got me active in urban issues, introduced me to Carl Lynn. I was very involved in the neighborhood commons project here, that was really done under the auspices of Fritz's organization. So I knew him very well. In retrospect, I didn't realize until after his death how pivotal he was in everything. I wish he were still around. I don't think I got as much of his wisdom as I'd like to have gotten in the long run. Fritz ended up on the Board. There had been the

Metropolitan Area Transit Plan, Transportation Plan, of nineteen—

Schrag: Fifty-nine.

Cooper: Fifty-nine. And you've seen that, so you know that, which he was very much involved in. I had taken Fritz along with other dignitaries for about three years running out to the Dulles site in the late 1950s as that was going up, and particularly when Eero died. He died before the terminal really took form. At any rate, Fritz was very much aware of my presence here in Washington. As Dulles wore down, and I decided to stay and open an office, I continued to work with Neighborhood Commons and saw him frequently. He said—and I had decided to open an office—we need somebody to really step in and do something creative about the architectural program for this thing. I'd like to get you.

[A comment at this point has been deleted at the narrator's request.]

So he went to the board and said, Rannells needs an assistant, and I've got your assistant. So I emerged on the scene with John. John and I got along fine. John was absolutely lost about how to put together any kind of a way of looking at the system as a new architectural endeavor, not just as a subway system,

but something that had a strong sense of form to it. And it was a shaper in an architectural sense of the urban environment. As more than just a transportation/sociological/economic thing.

In my brashness at that time, as a thirty-some-year-old kid, I sat down and wrote an architectural master plan for the system. And it envisioned a system-wide design. In certain attributes, that I've forgotten if that one thing got into Stan's thing or not, it was a good, gutsy start for the program. And it was supposed to kind-of kick everything off and stimulate the idea that this was going to be a major part of the game, because it had been seen as an engineering game up until that point.

Schrag: Could I explore some of these themes, before you go on? First of all, do you have a sense of why Gutheim believed it had to be architecturally innovative? One of the models that everyone was looking at the time was Toronto, which was basically a clean version of New York. It was a box.

Cooper: I don't know Toronto.

Schrag: People liked it. It was seen as—I think without Toronto—

Cooper: I can tell you exactly why. Because Eero had just given Washington Dulles, which was an innovative architectural masterpiece and here was the next big transportation thing. Eero's father had given Finland the terminal in Helsinki and then Eero had come along with the air age, and this was the new age, the urban age. And Eero was gone; he couldn't be a contributor to this. Gutheim said, what we need is to make this worthy of the Nation's Capital. And it needs to be a piece of architecture as well as engineering. He saw this with a broad cultural way of looking at urban design.

Schrag: Had you faced any of the same fight over Dulles? That is, was it easy to persuade people that an airport had to be architecturally innovative?

Cooper: It was terrible.

Schrag: It was the same fight?

Cooper: Same fight.

Schrag: OK. So in that sense, just the notion of selling that it had to be some kind of interesting architecture—

Cooper: I can give you two sentences I think that will sum this up. When Eero sent me down here, there was, I don't know, eight million dollars assigned for the

terminal and Herb Howell, who was the real force behind Dulles, a great public servant, said to me—he was the kind of person who was a good mentor. He was a mentor to Jim Wilding, who has gone on. Jim and I were the two kids on Dulles. He is just now ready for retirement, if he hasn't done it this year, from the MWAA, the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority. He said, the thing that I want you to understand is that we don't want any monuments here, with this terminal building. We want a good, functional terminal building. That was not what Eero had in mind. I thought long and hard about this. One day over lunch, I said to Herb, you know, I think that one of the functions of this terminal is to be the gateway to the Nation's Capital. If that's monumental, so be it. But I think that what you're saying, Herb, I think your heart's in the right place, but let's not forget the fact that it is a cultural facility. This really—God only knows how I got this idea, but it really sat with him. And it unlocked Howell to let Eero really do a good building.

Schrag: Why was Eero already involved. He had already done TWA, in New York?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: “So when they hired him, didn’t they know they were going to get something flashy?

Cooper: Yes, but they wanted to control it. They didn’t want it to be like TWA. TWA is a billboard. And it was designed to be a billboard. All the terminals around the peripheral road there at what was then Idlewild were designed to show off their airline. And Eero just did what he was supposed to do. All this crap about grapefruits at the table and all that is sort of half true.

Schrag: Sorry, grapefruits at the table?

Cooper: Eero said that his idea was cutting the grapefruit at the breakfast table and spreading the two halves out, like this. The truth of the matter was that whether there were grapefruit involved or not, there was a very good shell designer in Boyd Anderson. It was critical that this airport not become a series of billboards. It needed to be a central terminal, because this was a government owned thing, and not really airline owned, which is what Kennedy really is.

Schrag: So you have that same distinction between a public and a commercial space that later shows up with subways, how much advertising you’re going to have.

Cooper: Absolutely. There are parallels there. You're onto it. You're on the right track.

Schrag: When you were working at Dulles, was there an engineering consultant? One of the things I see with Metro is that there's the general engineering contractor and the general architectural contractor and they're—neither one is ahead of the other in the chain of command. That leads to a lot of interesting debates back and forth. Was that the same structure at Dulles?

Cooper: No, Eero was a subcontractor to Ammann and Whitney, the engineering firm, the bridge builders out of New York.

Schrag: Did they put forth their own pressure to make it more functional?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: How was that resolved?

Cooper: It was resolved by my establishing a first-name basis, a mentor relationship, being mentored by Herb Howell, and then in turn mentoring him, the truth of the matter.

Schrag: So the politician trumps the engineers.

Cooper: Ammann and Whitney got, yeah, trumped. They didn’t know what had hit them, to be perfectly honest with you, until it was too late for them to do anything about it. And Boyd Anderson was one of their partners, and he was a very good engineer, and he was fascinated to do a catenary structure. So all of a sudden, we’re off to the races.

Schrag: Let me see if I have any other questions about Dulles.

Cooper: Go ahead.

Schrag: When Dulles was built,, it was sort of built in the middle of nowhere. Is that more or less true? There weren’t the same kind of architectural constraints that you might have faced in downtown Washington.

Cooper: True.

Schrag: Was there any reaction against this very modernist design for Dulles? Once you’ve got the idea that it’s going to be an architectural design, rather than a strictly functional engineering design, did people fight the notion that it would be in the modernist vein?

Cooper: No. Because the design itself was so stately, it was such a classic design. It had the spirit of flight in it, and it had the colonnade of ancient Rome. It

was a Burnham design on one hand—the city beautiful—and yet it was an engineering tour de force. And everybody accepted that as appropriate.

Schrag: OK. I'd like to back up a little further—

Cooper: And it was monochromatic.

Schrag: But with the latest techniques and materials. Which again, is another precedent.

Cooper: Yes, that's right. You'll find it again.

Schrag: This is just what I am trying to piece out, is what the various influences were. And certainly Dulles Airport is one. I want to get to Union Station a bit, since you bring up Burnham. But I'd like to get back to Cranbrook. Now, you were trained at Cranbrook.

Cooper: That's right.

Schrag: You used the term urbanist before. Was Cranbrook—Where was Cranbrook's position as a center of urbanism?

Cooper: Eliel Saarinen. The city in history.

Schrag: Saarinen believed that the city was still vital and needed to be kept so.

Cooper: Absolutely.

Schrag: He wrote, after the Chicago Tribune competition, that it was wrong to design a skyscraper without regard to the context of the city plan around it. There was this continuum between architecture and urban planning. It seems to me that, from what you mentioned, Gutheim would have agreed with that.

Cooper: Strongly.

Schrag: Would that distinguish the Cranbrook school from other modernists, such as Mies and Gropius?

Cooper: I think so. The Bauhaus per se really didn’t deal with contextualism at all. It had a different role. This is the philosophy within which I was raised as an architect. I’m still an absolutely strong proponent of modernism per se. But the day I arrived at Cranbrook. The first moment, I sat down with Eliel Saarinen. This was before I was really enrolled. When I was—I had elected to go there, I had been accepted.

Schrag: Where had you been trained before?

Cooper: University of Pennsylvania.

Schrag: So you got a bachelor’s in architecture?

Cooper: I got a bachelor in architecture. I went to Cranbrook. Then I won the Paris prize, and went to

the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, then traveled in Europe, before I settled with Eero, when my real architectural education started. By that time, I think I was ready for it.

Schrag: But you arrived at Cranbrook—

Cooper: I arrived. It was one of these occurrences that happens so rarely. Eliel Saarinen had just won Gold Medal from RBIA. He had just gotten the cable, which was sitting on his desk. My roommate and I, who was another architect, sat down with him. He was a stuffy, old pontificator, is the truth of the matter, which infuriated me. He said, you know, the next generation remains trying to consolidate the great innovate steps that my generation has taken. I could have killed him. [laughter] But he was absolutely right, and it's only in my later years that I have come to see how right he really was. This is what we have been doing. We fought off all this crap about postmodernism and one thing and another, in order to try to find modern roots and a modern sensibility. It's the modern sensibility that is still nascent and has not yet taken total form, that people like Eero, and Weese, among the many, and Kevin Roche, and I could go on, have been really trying to do. These are the people in the end who

have been struggling. One of the things Eero taught me was about contextualism. He didn’t have a style, except that he was a modernist.

Schrag: What does that mean. What is modernism, if not a style?

Cooper: Modernism is an imported style to begin with. It is a style. But it isn’t a philosophy, in its full sense at all. It’s based on the concept, form follows function, and it doesn’t say anything about fitting. Somebody that I read recently says that modernism was rooted in the triad of Vitruvius, to which we’d damn well be adding very soon the fourth dimension, which is really context.

Schrag: What are the first three?

Cooper: Commodity, firmness, and delight are Vitruvius.

Schrag: I have no training in architecture, as is becoming apparent.

Cooper: Contextualism is the other piece of the triad.

Schrag: In terms of distinguishing Saarinen’s modernism from Corbusier or the Bauhaus, one question I have is, did he have an approach toward the automobile?

Cooper: Saarinen?

Schrag: Eliel Saarinen. This is the big issue to me in Metro, is it's a response to the automobile in many ways. Starting with Corbusier and going on, with urban renewal, it seems to me that one modernist approach is to do what was done here in Southwest. Bulldozing it flat.

Cooper: Sweeping it clean.

Schrag: And put in a very automobile-centered design. You have big freeways. Some people would trace the proposals for freeways in Washington, that Metro was built to obviate—

Cooper: To augment.

Schrag: Well, this is chapter 2. Originally it is proposed to augment, then Stolzenbach comes on and says, we're going to replace freeways with Metro. But one of the early voices for building the freeways everywhere is Louis Justement, who seems to me to be basically proposing a Corbusian approach to the city, which is also modernist. I'm a little confused. How can modernism call for that bulldozing approach, and also call for contextualism?

Cooper: Modernism, the original modernism, the imported style of modernism, the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, style, the Bauhaus,

wasn’t contextual. That style, by the end of the Second World War, had been taken over by corporate America, as being something they could work with for the big expansion of the post-World War II period. Modernism was spread cookie-cutter style. The modern style, not modernism. This spread all over America. In the end, the fact that it was not rooted really in a genuine cultural philosophy, attitude, but rather was an imported style that had been appropriated by commercial interests, began to turn people off. Architects—I believe erroneously, but nonetheless—the rise of postmodernism, which was the import of a bunch of gobbledy-gook, really. Which was again a style, not a philosophy. Although people kept talking about it as postmodern philosophy, it really wasn’t. It was a postmodern style. It rose to replace this other style. So we’ve had a sequence of styles going along, whereas we have been really searching for the indigenous roots of a philosophy of building that makes sense here in America. Which is different. We still don’t really have it.

Schrag: But it would include contextualism?

Cooper: Definitely it would include contextualism. It would include the sense of the frontier. It would include, now, the whole issue of environmental

responsibility, which the modernists began to hint towards but didn't really have the stuff at their command to really deal with it. The new movement that I think will come, if it doesn't get co-opted by some style— The only thing that worries me about Frank Gehry, who I think is genuinely a marvelous architect, is that he's going to produce a whole bunch of cookie-cutter, ribbon-like young people, who are going to be trashing the world with pseudo-Gehrys, as opposed to really going through the same kind of evolution that went through in Gehry's mind, in order to get the liberation, in order to do this.

Schrag: This happens all the time. If you look at city planning, you start with Olmsted designs for curvilinear streets in Riverside and Roland Park, that are hilly neighborhoods and those get put onto—

Cooper: Flat pieces.

Schrag: Completely flat, featureless plains. By all those imitators. I'm not sure there's anything you can do to prevent that.

Cooper: No. But this isn't the philosophy. This may be the superficial manifestation. The philosophy of the suburb, which is what you're talking about, is really different.

Schrag: In terms of precedents, were you at all familiar with the 1939 Smithsonian proposal? Because I know that was revived in the early fifties. They were thinking about it.

Cooper: I certainly am familiar with it, but I wasn’t in the Saarinen office then.

Schrag: At either point. In ’53.

Cooper: I joined the Saarinen office in either ’53 or ’54.

Schrag: So just after that.

Cooper: Yes. That was a dead issue by then. Actually, my so-called mentor on the Paris prize, it was John or Ralph, I forget, Walker, who was with McKim, was the guy who was designing the new Museum of American History, which was the thing that replaced Saarinen’s design, at the time.

Schrag: Do you have any comments, just from your second-hand familiarity with it? I’ve seen some blurry photos of it. I’m making arrangements to see the model. Would you say that was an appropriate, contextual design for the Mall?

Cooper: I have to look at it from today’s eyes. The Mall was a quite different place in 1950. I think the Mall could have stood that building. I think that

building would have changed before it got designed. I don’t know how much you know about architecture, but all of us are forced, just by the nature of time and economics and everything else, to work on getting an understanding of program. Then we try to give form to program. We have to do this under a very, very tight deadline, normally. The kind of thing, if you had seen the early sketches for the terminal building at Dulles, for example, you’ll find they lack the sophistication of the final design. There are a couple of pictures of early sketches. [Richard Guy] Wilson, the professor at U. Va., has written a book on Virginia architecture. I don’t know whether my copy is here; it may be at home. I don’t think it’s here. A couple of the early sketches of Dulles are in that book. That might help you a little bit to sense that. I face this all the time with the work I do. The model you see there is a master planning model. The first time I’d seen all of the design ideas together was that model. By the time we start building individual buildings, each one of those structures will assume a whole new life. It will be refined, and it will become different. I’m not sure how we got into this particular, but you were talking about Eliel

Saarinen’s design for the Mall. I think that’s what would have happened.

Schrag: It would have gotten refined quite a bit.

Cooper: It would have gotten refined quite a bit. Eliel Saarinen had moved off the total use of a symmetrical solution at that point in time. Whereas the peristyle at Cranbrook is so close to being symmetrical that it might as well be. But people were dabbling with asymmetrical compositions. And it got replaced with a very symmetrical building down there. I don’t know what would have happened, but it wouldn’t have been the same building that won the competition. The closest example of a building winning the competition ever getting built is the arch. And I know that everything changed in the arch. The form is really, has a whole different scientific root. It isn’t a parabola. It’s a weighted catenary, reversed.

Schrag: OK.

Cooper: It’s stuff like that, that you don’t know, but which makes an enormous amount of difference. The same is true when we did the Vietnam memorial. Maya’s design was a very simple thing that sat in a field. But in order to make that happen, we had to change the

design radically, and then bring it back to the point where it looks like, oh, this was the evolution of that design. But it’s really quite different.

Schrag: In what way? This is off the subject, but it’s quite interesting.

Cooper: Well, Maya was a student. Things like, how many people really died? And how big can names be? And how many names do you have to inscribe? When you really laid it out, if you didn’t want them to be that size, the thing had to be twice as long, but it was still on the same site. And then, it had to be handicapped [accessible]. And how do you keep people from falling off the wall who approach it from the back? And then how do you do you really get 50,000 names inscribed? You take something like that, a photographic engraving process had to be invented to do this. Which was the first example of it being done. It was really pioneered by the Binswanger Glass Corporation in Memphis, Tennessee. In order to get the granite from India through Montreal down here, cut into slabs in Bury, Vermont, but via Memphis, the slabs had to be thin enough that they could be handled by a fork-lift truck, or they couldn’t be manipulated to go through the

photographic process. All that stuff has to be worked out. You end up with something that has the spirit of the original design. You don't know that coming from the back, there's another ledge, that you don't see. That replaced the pipe rail system that the Park Service wanted us to put on the top. These things are long, evolutionary things, that happen over the period of time. It takes a couple of years to work through anything.

Schrag: I assume that this is what a lot of your work in Gallery Place and Judiciary Square ends up being, was this translation from the sketch to the details of a functioning station.

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: We'll get to that. But to take you back to the 1950s. Dulles. You were able to sell Dulles because it was appropriate to Washington. It was public rather than commercial. It was monochromatic. Were did that notion come in, of making it stately enough to the politicians?

Cooper: It was clearly a Saarinen concept. These things get so complicated. John Dinkeloo had been playing around with gap-graded architecture. Bush-hammered.

He had been doing it for several years. They tried several projects with it before Dulles.

Schrag: I’m sorry. What does that mean?

Cooper: Normal concrete has stones in the matrix. These are graded, some fine, some middle-size, some larger. By knocking out the middle range entirely, and leaving only the big stones and the little fines, allows the big stones to come to the surface. Normally, they sink inside. By doing that, it enables you to bush-hammer, taking the first eighth-inch off the surface, and reveal them. Which allowed us to do a limestone building out of concrete. So the dolomite limestone that’s quarried over north of Townsend, Maryland, and trucked over here, could be used. It was strong enough to be used as the aggregate in the terminal building. And with gap-grading, we could bush-hammer that surface to take the form-marks and everything off, and revealing a largely limestone façade. Limestone is the basic material, that and marble, of so many of the buildings here in Washington.

Schrag: Was there a lot of innovation in concrete going on at the time? I ask for the obvious reason that in

contributed so much to Metro’s original appearance. Now they’re painting it over.

Cooper: We’ll get to that. [laughter]

Schrag: Was there technological churn when it came do doing these big, concrete forms?

Cooper: There was a lot of experimentation, and Dinkeloo was really on the edge of it. John Dinkeloo was Eero’s partner, and Kevin Roche was his chief design associate. When Eero died, they formed the firm that became Roche-Dinkeloo, which is the successor firm and has done very good work. Kevin was rewarded a few years ago the gold medal of architecture, which Eero got posthumously.

Schrag: So Dulles is a success. Gutheim says, that’s what we need for the Metro.

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: I’m not sure if I’ve asked this, but do you have a sense of why?

Cooper: That’s what we’ve been talking about. He saw architecture as a cultural phenomenon.

Schrag: My question there would be, to what extent was it to lure riders on to the system? One of the reasons that gets put forward for having Metro be attractive

is, how are you going to get people to ride it. A very utilitarian argument, that people like their cars, cars are beautiful. If you want to get them out of the car and onto transit, you have to make transit equally attractive. Was Gutheim going beyond that?

Cooper: Yes. He was seeing this as making transit as culturally significant in an architectural sense as air transportation.

Schrag: Do you have any comments on the state or architecture in monumental Washington, with the whole controversy over the Rayburn Building and everything else? Was there anything good being built inside of Washington?

Cooper: No. The only thing—Philip Johnson was about to do his very mannerist, wonderful little pavilion out here at Dumbarton Oaks, which is fully modern but is couched as a Byzantine kind of thing for a Byzantine collection.

Schrag: One other precedent, to bring it up, is Arena Stage. Do you have any— I believe this was Weese's first actual work here in Washington. Do you have any comments on why that works or doesn't?

Cooper: Do I have any comments on why that works?

Schrag: It got good reviews.

Cooper: Yes. Harry was good. And this was a very modest, little building, down in Southwest. Harry had some experience in theater design, and was one of the club of architects that one could be interested in. An emerging guy. It does work. It doesn’t really have anything to do with Washington, but it has something to do with— it fits very well. It is the best building in Southwest, is the truth of the matter.

Schrag: The one thing I’ve been having a lot of trouble with, is that it seems that the obvious model — if you say, we’re not going to do Toronto and something very box—the obvious model at the time was Stockholm. Everyone was talking about the Stockholm subway. How beautiful it was, how architecturally innovative it was. San Francisco ends up using it as a model. Indeed, John Insco Williams—I think he was a fairly junior person within the NCTA—but he had experience in Stockholm and Helsinki and was saying, this is what we need. There the approach was to have every station different. Why reject that in favor of this system-wide design?

Cooper: I think that Stan [Allan] gives you Harry's answer in this book. [*For the Glory of Washington*] This was something that, for the same reason that Dulles wasn't Idlewild, it begins to—. These stations that are based fully on contextualism, so-called, have tended to be kind of kitsch kind of stuff. They're hard to maintain. They give you a sense of identity of the location, but if you're going to run a system and make it economic, what you really want is you want people to be able, when they get off, to know exactly where they're going to find everything. I guess it's kind of the thing that was getting worked out. In the same period of time was the whole McDonald's syndrome and the Holiday Inn. Transportation was getting to the point where you wanted to be able—people were traveling so much more—that you wanted people to be able to know what to do and how to move instinctively without having to learn everything new. In addition to the issue of maintenance, where all the doors are the same manufacturer and the locks are the same style and the keying is easy to handle and the paint color. You can have a custom color as the standard, and everyone knows how to reorder it, you know, custom number 92.

Schrag: Originally, that architecture was only going to go to the District line.

Cooper: Not that I know of.

Schrag: That may have been the suburbs—

Cooper: The difference between Stockholm or Paris or London, any of the great subway systems, and this system is fundamentally because of the fact— I have to say that I'm seeing—you said something a while back about replacing freeways. This system, at that point, really was changed to replace, to be radial. As opposed to a net. That's one of the problems we have today. We don't have a net subway system, which means that places like Georgetown, and one thing and another, were left out. Because we've got this series of spokes that do weave to define so-called downtown. The radials all come in and loop. That's the system. That's the basic system in Paris, too. But here, it's really turned into a radial system instead of being nettish in its way of moving.

Schrag: To go back to your story at the NCTA. You were brought on by Gutheim to make sure this thing would work architecturally. Rannells, as I understand it, had planning experience in Philadelphia, but—

Cooper: He didn't have any architectural vision.

Schrag: He didn’t have any architectural experience. Did you face resistance within the agency? Or did you pretty much have the ear of the people who had the power to make decisions?

Cooper: Pretty much, I think. First of all, they didn’t know what was hitting them. They had been told by their board that architecture had to find a strong place, because Gutheim had banged on the table. DeLeuw Cather, when they were hired, really thought that they would, as they have everywhere else in the world, that they would have the architect under their thumb. When the architect was given a separate contract—on Dulles we were working for the engineer. I pushed very hard to not have this happen, because it took me a hell of a lot of work to establish our autonomy here in Washington and still keep that partnership together. Ammann and Whitney wasn’t ever outraged about the overall thing. Rather, they saw what was happening as contributing to their glory. DeLeuw Cather wasn’t sure of this at all.

Schrag: They had their own people drawing up these box designs. This may be later—

Cooper: It wasn’t later. It was very fast.

Schrag: Did you have contact with those people?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: What were those discussions like?

Cooper: They were grim. DeLeuw Cather got, as I recall, it was pretty close to a year's head start. Maybe it was only six months—everything was really moving along on this thing—before we could get the architecture program underway. When Harry was hired and started work —we're skipping over the whole issue of the decision to hire him—when he started work—DeLeuw, Cather is based in Chicago, as is he, and this worried a lot of people because a lot of the meetings were taking place between the two of them out there. At the time that Harry got hired, my role really at that point was apparently pretty well done. As it turned out, it wasn't, but I didn't know that at the time. There was a period of time that I only found out about—I didn't know what was going on until later.

Schrag: Were you employed—were you a consultant to the NCTA at that point?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: Not on the agency staff.

Cooper: Right. My job was to get a really great architect hired. We did it, and Weese came aboard, and

everybody breathed a sigh of relief and said, thank you Kent, go do your practice. So I went and did my practice.

Schrag: When was your partnership formed? That was much later? Cooper-Lecky?

Cooper: Cooper-Lecky? I was first Kent Cooper, architect.

Schrag: So at this point you are Kent Cooper, architect, hired as a consultant to the NCTA.

Cooper: Right. I probably had an office of eight or ten people at that time.

Schrag: And was that full time, when you were doing the original consultancy?

Cooper: No, no. I was building buildings the whole time. This was just another job in the office.

Schrag: So once you had found Weese, you stepped back a bit?

Cooper: My consultant role per se was pretty well over.

Schrag: OK. That clears things up. These are some of the things that aren’t clear from the documents.

Cooper: All of a sudden, in the middle of the Weese design, there was a point where the—I’ve forgotten the acronym.

Schrag: The regional one?

Cooper: No, before WMATA.

Schrag: Oh, the NCTA.

Cooper: NCTA. That's it. They were really unhappy with Harry. They called me back in to go out and pull Harry's plug and just get him back in line, which I did. I was active, very active for a couple of months in that process. But then I formed an association with Ammann and Whitney and went after the first section design. And this was an entirely different thing, this was a competitive thing, in which we were successful. And it was a good team, Ammann and Whitney, which I had a good working relationship with from Dulles. It really wasn't the same people at Amman and Whitney, but it was a good relationship." I really had three different phases of work.

Schrag: Should we go back to the first one, of selecting Weese? How was that search conducted?

Cooper: We wrote a letter of invitation, which I think may be in here [*For the Glory of Washington*] which really invited people to come in and design a prototypical subway system. And it was a prototypical thing that I kept hammering to get in. I don't remember whether the architectural so-called

master plan—or concept plan, or whatever, but it was really an outline vision of the system, an architectural vision plan—is in here or not. I think that was appended to the letter.

Schrag: That's one of the things I'm trying to trace. How much of this notion of prototypicality was in the original specifications?

Cooper: It definitely was in. Absolutely.

Schrag: Did you have any experience with prototypes? Because Weese comes along, he says, we've done Cummins, we've done Purity Foods. Had you done any work like that?

Cooper: The mobile lounge was a prototype, don't forget. I spent a couple of years of my young life trying to get that damn vehicle put together. And it never got put together right. But I had a lot of prototypical experience.

Schrag Designing that vehicle for Dulles.

Cooper: Right. It had to be invented, and it's a cross between a railroad car and a tank. That's another long story. We don't need to get into that at all.

Schrag The best is when you get in, and someone says, this is the strangest airplane I've ever been on.

Cooper: I get that same feeling every time I go out there. [laughter]

Schrag But you had not worked on a fast-food chain or anything.

Cooper: No. But you needed a prototypical answer.

Schrag How did you advertise the competition?

Cooper: We really worked all the avenues we possibly could. We used the architectural magazines. We used the press. We used NEA. We used just, kind of any way that we could think of to get the name out. We made a long enough time that we could get into the AIA journals and the architectural magazines and *Engineering News-Record, meet* their publication dates.

Schrag Do you recall any conflict with Rannells about whether this would be a nationwide search? Because I know at one point he said, well, we can find an architect nearby, no problem.

Cooper: Yes. I was adamant that we do this. Absolutely. We also, to be honest with you, picked a list of, I don’t know, ten, twenty architects which we sent the letter to directly. Weese was one of them. This was not loaded for Weese at all.

Schrag: But you knew Weese.

Cooper: I knew Weese. But for the grace of God I didn’t work for him instead of Eero.

Schrag: Do you mean by chance, or it was a very good thing you didn’t work for him?

Cooper: No, it was by chance. I wanted to work for Weese, not Eero. He didn’t have any work. The day I started for Eero, I got a telegram saying, I’ve just gotten the Ghana Embassy. Come. It was too late.

Schrag: Can you describe him personally?

Cooper: Harry was very warm, personable, facile designer. Really interested in physical things, in environment. Charming. Sketched well. Had brilliant ideas. Was interested in the city, in the environment. Even though he was an acutely sensitive modernist was one of the early people who understood the role of restoration.

Schrag: Could we get into that more? That’s certainly something that was lacking in the Corbusian version of modernism is preservation.

Cooper: Absolutely.

Schrag: Was that taught at all at Cranbrook? Was that part of Eliel’s—

Cooper: Cranbrook was such a terrific education, being involved, surrounded by the arts. And all of us were. Not only were we doing buildings and things. We were building furniture, we were weaving rugs, doing pots, doing sculpture, painting, making love. It was one of these environments that was very intense, Bohemian kind of place. It was all-consuming. When Harry was there, it was at the end of the very heighth period, when [Harry] Bertoia, and Charlie Eames, and so forth—. Harry was one of the kind of young kids who was coming in at the end of that, along with Eero. Millis was still there. Maija Grotell, the potter. Marianne Strengell, the weaver. It was a very intense kind of place.

Schrag: But there was no one there saying, I'm going to do historic preservation.

Cooper: No.

Schrag: So do you have a sense of where that came in? How Weese—

Cooper: I think it was just part of the cultural milieu. I can't give you a better answer than that. Harry really believed in the city, and in making buildings fit. Eero did too. I guess Eliel Saarinen was the key to the thing, because he was the guy who was

filling these kids minds with concepts. It's the best I can do for you. But they were unusual. At the same time, Gropius and Breuer and that gang had no concept of what restoration was. Or interest in it.

Schrag: I have some article, somewhere, comparing Weese to Sullivan and Burnham. Which struck me, just because of Burnham's role here. Do you have any—do you see that influence, on Weese in general? Of Daniel Burnham? Of that Chicago urbanism?

Cooper: Harry would have liked to have been the second Burnham. He tried very hard to get the World's Fair off the ground out there. They thought they'd done it, and it got politically bombed.

Schrag: This was in—

Cooper: In Chicago

Schrag: In '64?

Cooper: Whenever the hell it was. I don't know when it was '64 or '76. It could have been the bicentennial. The thing that he had, that makes the connection with Burnham for me, is that he had the concept of total architecture, of architecture being city planning, being transportation planning, being buildings, being sociologically important, culturally astute. And that's what Burnham gave us, instead of a

parochial attitude toward stylistic-ness. That's how Harry was a Burnham.

Schrag: Obviously this would have promoted him, when you were looking for someone to do a transit system. Someone who could think on all of those levels.

Cooper: Yes. But I think that the letter that he wrote back is here [in *For the Glory of Washington*]. It's a masterful job. Stan said they spent the whole weekend, in camera, just working on this letter, to try to draft it, and redraft it, and jiggle it, until it was a great cookie letter.

Schrag: The plum that you were offering, the chance to design the system, this was a big deal?

Cooper: Sure.

Schrag: How come?

Cooper: Because it was the first time it had ever happened. Here we were in a period of rapid urbanization, and transportation was coming to the fore as going to be where it was at, in terms of a problem. And here was the chance to take the nation's capital and invent from the ground up a whole new transportation system. My god!

Schrag: But this is public transit we are talking about. It's getting riders, not so bad in the mid 1960s as it had looked in the mid 1950s, but the notion of a subway's being at all attractive was, I think, still somewhat new to a lot of people.

Cooper: Sure, subways were dogs. They were run-down, engineering oriented, and the like. And here was a chance where architecture was going to be thought of as an important tool, a prototype.

Schrag: So this was attractive to a lot of architects. I do have some of the story of the SOM proposal and other proposals from Allan's book. And Weese was selected, as you say, largely on the basis of the letter. Who actually did the picking? Was it you and Rannells?

Cooper: Rannells and I were on the board, or the small group. Cody Pfanstiehl. The director of engineering, I can't bring back his name.

Schrag: Keith?

Cooper: I can see him.

Schrag: Keith? Deen? I know there was a lot of turnover.

Cooper: I'm sorry. The two guys that were there, that I can't remember the name of—I can picture them—are the guy who was head of planning, like city

planning, not fiscal planning, and the director of engineering. They both were pretty well neutered by the fact that they were clearly told that this was not to be an engineering solution. Let the architects have their day.

Schrag: With Gutheim still standing as patron?

Cooper: That’s right.

Schrag: So your power flowed from him.

Cooper: Absolutely. Totally. And his influence in Congress and with Walter [McCarter].

Schrag: This is stuff that does not always show up in documents, you understand.

Cooper: No.

Schrag: So was he actually on the committee that was looking at designed? Or he just nodded?

Cooper: I imagine that designs were shown to him. You see, in the period when I wasn’t really very much involved—I had the whole thing with Harry, that was another thing. I came back in. The day they picked Amman and Whitney and me to do the first section, the Fine Arts Commission turned down the design. All of these meetings out in Chicago had led to Harry buying the box solution. And Harry was enough of a

pragmatist and a functionalist to listen to the engineers, and he was in field that he didn’t understand, that he didn’t have experience in yet.”

Schrag: So he had not that experience that you had had at Dulles, of taming engineers.

Cooper: God knows he had been working with enough engineers.

Schrag: He was an engineer himself. That’s one of the ironies of this. He was a registered engineer.

Cooper: Maybe that was the problem. [laughter] But at any rate, he bought this. He jiggled it around a little bit, made it more articulate. When it got to fine arts, Bill Walton took a look at it, and he hit the fucking ceiling. How could you do this? How could you bring this to us?

Schrag Who was he? I have these names.

Cooper: He was the chairman of the Fine Arts Commission.

Schrag. And he was an architect?

Cooper: No, he was a painter. He was the confidant of the president. He was Jackie Kennedy’s choice to be chairman of fine arts.

Schrag And he’s the one who helps determine the shape of the subway station. This is interesting from the policy angle.

Cooper: It really is.

Schrag So we've got a painter appointed by the previous, assassinated president, who is telling the architect he should not listen to the engineers. Also on that commission is the widow of Eero Saarinen, who created Dulles. Should I see Aline Saarinen as somehow the voice of Cranbrook in all of this?

Cooper. No, I wouldn't call her the voice of Cranbrook at all. Aline was the voice of *Vanity Fair.* [laughter] She was very good. She was very helpful to me personally, and I was very helpful to her, too. She was the new interloper in Bloomfield Hills. Everyone loved Eero's first wife, the potter. Which was a tragedy that it didn't work out, but it didn't. Aline came along. The upwardly mobile, stylistic editor from New York. She was an outsider in Bloomfield Hills. Some of us really tried to be nice to this lady, and to help her get aboard. We thought it was good for us to do this, but it was very good for her. She began to get the measure of what was going on in the office, and as soon as she understood what was going on, she was terribly useful to Eero. All of a sudden, his career just took off like that, because of the contacts.

Schrag: So she didn't have any particular — did she have a design philosophy that was influential, or was it more her skill as a —?

Cooper: You can probably pick that up if you want to read *The Proud Possessors,* her book on collectors. You can pick up a lot from that.

Schrag: I'm trying to understand who these people were on the Commission of Fine Arts. You have Walton the painter. Do you have a sense of why he reacted so strongly to the DeLeuw, Cather plus Weese design?

Cooper: It didn't evoke any vision. It looked to him like when it got dirty, it would look like New York.

Schrag: New York is always the counter-example. Whatever we do, it has to be the anti-New York.

Cooper: Right.

Schrag: That's why I asked about Stockholm. Because that's very anti-New York as well. I assume, the arts world being the way it was, everyone on the board would have thought of New York when they thought of a subway. When I pick up my *American Heritage Dictionary* and turn to "subway," there's a picture of New York. It seems to me that that was one of the big motivations here, was, we've got to do something that's not like New York. In part for aesthetic

reasons, in part for practical reasons. Who would want to ride such a thing if they didn't have to? Gordon Bunshaft, it seems to me, also had a role. He was the one who eventually sketches the vault on the back of a foam core or something. Weese says, Oh yes, we can do that. Do you have a sense of where he was coming from?

Cooper: We always called him "The Nazi." [laughter] He was a very good architect. I think that what he was saying was just plain, that it isn't spatially adventurous enough. You're listening to the engineers too strongly. What we want is we want an underground volume. When you do this, it makes a round thing.

Schrag: This is a vague question—

Cooper: It's structural too.

Schrag: Is there anything about doing architecture underground. When I look to architectural magazines, and they do a building, they'll have five shots of the exterior and maybe one of some interior. When you do a subway, it's all interior. Does that represent a fundamentally different problem to an architect?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: In what ways?

Cooper: This is another one of those things. I hate to keep saying this, but it’s so goddamn complicated. You’re asking for simple, three sentence answers. First of all, the problem with a subway isn’t holding the earth off of it; it’s keeping the earth from disgorging the subway.

Schrag: I didn’t know that.

Cooper: The earth is fluid. So a thing that’s light, and full of air, tends to want to rise out. You’ve got to keep the soil from falling down into it, but the biggest problem is holding it down. The same way with the Dulles roof. You think of roofs as — but a catenary roof, the problem, as with catenary bridges, is to keep them from pushing up, with some kind of force, and then coming down again, with greater force, which is what killed Tacoma, the bridge over Tacoma Sound. There’s a whole different structural logic that you have to start thinking about when you’re underground. That’s point one. Secondly, we see things by virtue of illumination. Everybody said, when I ended Cooper-Lecky and moved into my own office here, my god! You’re taking the old locker room, by what used to be a swimming pool. It doesn’t have any windows. How are you going to live? In the interior, I do so much audiovisual work

it’s fine; I don’t have any windows to screen off. We see things on the basis of how they’re illuminated, and you put your accent on how you want people to be perceiving the space. In case of the subway, the Weese design, you’ll notice that there’s an enormous amount of up-illumination from the perimeter, which is totally intentional. There’s light that’s coming down, that lights the platform per se, but the idea is that you need to light the space. That’s one of the things that makes New York bad: the space isn’t illuminated. The subway platform is, but then you’ve just got this dark cavern. So you have to start thinking about how will artificial illumination deliver the spatiality that you’re looking for. That’s a fast answer. That’s the biggest single thing.

Schrag: The biggest differences between regular, above-ground architecture.

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: The first one. Are architects well trained to do that sort of work in the earth? Or is that one of the reasons engineers had more clout?

Cooper: I think it’s one of the reasons they got more clout.

Schrag Engineers do that all the time. They're building railroad tunnels, and underground garages, things that architects wouldn't be called on to work on.

Cooper: That's right. Architects are visual animals, and this is not a visible force that you're looking at here. It really does make a difference. This is the problem with the convention center over here. The sixty feet in the earth. One of the big problems is keeping that building down. We don't know yet how it's going to perform.

Schrag We were talking about the— How are we doing for time? I can come back; my schedule is very flexible.

Cooper: If we can talk until four, that's OK with me. Then I need to focus on some other thing.

Schrag I'd rather get full answers to these questions and come back later.

Cooper: I'd rather you get through too.

Schrag OK. Just some of the other names on the Commission of Fine Arts. Chloethiel Smith shows up. Which strikes me as a bit ironic, in that she was in Southwest, paving everything flat and building up. Now she's facing Weese, who's more preservation oriented. Do you know if she had much of a role?

Cooper: She was one of the finalists for the job.

Schrag I didn't realize that.

Cooper: [Comment deleted at narrator's request.]

Schrag: Were any of the other finalists' designs particularly noteworthy? That is, if you were doing the history of the architecture of the Metro, are there things to be considered from the designs that were not chosen?

Cooper: They weren't designs. They were firms. There were no designs. There were approaches.

Schrag: This was just the approach.

Cooper: Whittelesey and Conklin of New York, who were the master planners at Lake Ann Center at Reston, and had done good urban work in New York City, were the — I really thought that probably they were going to get the job. They were very good. But you know, the interesting thing, is they knew all about subways and knew all about urbanization, but they didn't know all about prototypicalness. And they didn't see this as reinventing the idea of urban transportation, and that cost them the job. They struggled to understand what had happened to them. There was Chloethiel, and there was Harry, and there was a fourth. I don't think it was Skidmore.

Schrag: Maybe not. They may have been eliminated.

Cooper: There was somebody else. The guy from Louisiana, who just plain didn’t make it. Just didn’t come together. That’s not right, there’s another one. It doesn’t make any difference. But Harry really gave a masterful performance at that interview. He was head and shoulders above everybody else.

Schrag: So when the agency began to have problem with him—Rannells complains that Weese was very slow in setting up a Washington office, which had been in the agreement—was that why you were sent out there? To speed that process along?

Cooper: No, it was a complicated thing. I’d really have to go back into my read file to go back, to tell you all of the terms. Along the way, Harry got the idea that as opposed to coming up in buildings he wanted to come up in parks, because of the L’Enfant plan there were so many little triangles around, to come up in neutral territory. This was very controversial. In truth, in the end, it really didn’t work well. It was one of these conceptually clear ideas that was anti-urban.

Schrag How so?

Cooper: The city is built with big buildings all around, and you can’t get straight to the buildings. That everything comes up out in the open. Montreal is a subway system, where you can go anywhere and never see the sun. Which is marvelous in terms of bad weather, or heat, or what. The Washington subway did not take advantage of this. It puts escalators in open without covers. It has all kinds of problems. Granted, Harry, one by one, solved all the problems. The escalators are still a problem in Washington. In part, this is because they didn’t follow through with his recommendations, in terms of putting an in-house staff together to maintain them, and properly give them enough money on a regular basis, and we could go on and on about that. It wasn’t a case of his not being a responsible architect, but he did give them a high-maintenance solution. And he didn’t pay enough attention to the job in the middle point as he should have. There was no question. There were other things, but I’d have to really go back and search the files. This was thirty years ago.

Schrag: This was between the approval process and groundbreaking? Around 1968?

Cooper: Yes. This was when it was in the master plan stage, preliminary design.

Schrag: We've still got a little bit of time. I'd like to get to that last stage—

Cooper: Half an hour.

Schrag: —of your involvement, which is the first two stations. You said you were selected to that even prior to the final Weese plan being approved.

Cooper: Yes. We had the problem. We got the sketch. Bunshaft did his sketch, but then Harry did the formal sketch. That went in on Monday. This happened over the weekend. He went in on Monday, something like that. Fine Arts met and approved that. Tuesday morning, it was given to the section designers to do the working drawings. The mezzanines were kind of sketched like this within the vault, just about that degree of specificity. We started in and worked out the geometry of the vault, which had to have something that you could analyze structurally. It's a complicated piece of multiple radiuses—it's not a plain curve or anything like that. And it isn't an oval. It's somewhere in between.

Schrag: Why is that? Was that for engineering—

Cooper: Harry did a sketch. This is the way I want it to look. But it had no basis of geometry, and we had to

find a basis of geometry that you could use. Roger Burns in the office did that, did a good job.

Schrag: In your office.

Cooper: Yes. Then the division of coffers, the size of the coffers, had to get worked out. This is a combination of visual design and engineering.

Schrag: In understand from your earlier comments about Dulles that this was sort of standard. You start with a sketch of how it should look, then you work out the details. But to split that between different firms, was that unusual? Or is this just the sort of thing you would have been doing on Dulles?

Cooper: We did it all in one firm at Dulles. Here the firm was a little bit different.

Schrag: It didn’t represented a radical change.

Cooper: No, it didn’t. Our relationship with the Weese office was very warm . I had direct access to Harry, and Stan and I became good friends. It was working very smoothly.

Schrag: So you work out the geometry of the vault. Why does this vary from one station to another?

Cooper: Some of them are cut-and-cover. Some are liners, as opposed to holding in situ concrete.

Schrag: You mean the rock.

Cooper: In the rock, right. It takes a little bit different thing to do. The width is different, depending on the configuration of the platforms. The basic thing, of the side-platform stations, was our first design. Those are pretty well all, the ones that are cut-and-cover, are pretty well all the same.

Schrag: So you had to work out the geometry of the vault. What else?

Cooper: The other thing was these things.

Schrag: The mezzanines.

Cooper: Yes. One of the things was I had been through the problems of poured-in-place concrete, either sandblasted or bush-hammered, in place, in Dulles. From the start, I was really very concerned with this. How could we do this in an underground situation, with the problems I knew we were going to have. Dulles has many of the same problems, because of the leaning columns. You are doing up, bush-hammering and finishing the bottom of formwork pours, which is different from the side. Because the aggregate settles in a different way, is the problem. And pour joints. How do you work all that stuff out?

The first stations were not well managed in terms of construction administration by DeLeuw, Cather, and Metro didn't have its force, and the concrete did not come out well. In the final analysis, the decision was made, over my strong protest, to paint them. Once you paint them, it's all over, and you can't do anything else but paint them forever. I pushed very strongly to do remedial action on the concrete. But I lost the battle.

Schrag: Those stations were painted?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: But others were not?

Cooper: I don't know all told, whether they all got painted in the end or not. I don't know. The liners, there would be no excuse to paint.

Schrag: It's my sense that some of the recent ones—I think that Farragut North was just painted for the first time two or three years ago. It is a cut-and-cover station. They just thought it would be easier to paint than to clean. This was criticized in the *Washington Post* and elsewhere.

Cooper: I haven't followed that. You know more about that than I do. That's another issue. You could always paint them, but as soon as you paint them, it's very

hard to go back to sandblasting or bush-hammering. And the design didn't lend, the coffer design didn't lend itself well to bush-hammering. But the coffer design is the right way to diffuse light in the stations and get the acoustic panels in.

Schrag: The irony there is that it seems to me that's almost the one classical element in all of Metro. People say it looks like the Pantheon. But as I understand it, it was purely for functional reasons that those coffers showed up.

Cooper: They did what?

Schrag: That they were put in place. It was not to refer to Union Station or for any aesthetic reason.

Cooper: It was a combination of things. You have to get formwork. You need to get strength. And you need to get lightness, too. Beyond all that, when you have a straight surface in a long, thin thing like this, it's going to wave. It's going to look terrible. The coffers break it up with light and shadow, which give you a controlled way of dealing with formwork. It's all eight-foot boards. It's just the way concrete is done. This makes it possible to do that. It makes it more interesting. But it's the diffusion of light that's the key thing. It's why—remember I

said early in the game, what's the difference? The difference is that in this kind of thing, you really have to figure out an artificially illuminated way of delivering the space. The coffers are key to doing that.

The other thing is these things [mezzanines]. You've got this amorphic form of these things. How do you actually get them into place with respect to forming the concrete? We came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to precast all of these. We really worked our dogs to get a system of uniform pieces—an A, B, C, D and E that you could put together to make a kit to do any of these things. It's worked out very well.

Schrag: Thos same kits can be used for other stations.

Cooper: Right. And when you have to change the geometry for some reason, you have a basis for doing this. You change the radius of the A pieces, or something like that. They are all precast. Once you get it in place, then you can pour concrete in to hold them together, but that concrete never shows, doesn't show so you don't have to finish it.

Schrag: How different were the two stations, Gallery Place and Judiciary Square? Did you do one and then the

second one became not part of the prototype, but the first production model?

Cooper: Gallery Place ended up, we ended up doing the third station too, which is the cross station at Gallery Place. We did that with Rummel, Klepper & Kahl, out of Baltimore, not Ammann and Whitney. They didn’t get the job.

Schrag: Judiciary Square was your first contract?

Cooper: It included the first station at Gallery Place. But Gallery Place then got the second station when the 7th Street line went through. We made the connection between then. The cross-vault station.

Schrag: Were those built at the same time?

Cooper: No.

Schrag: The Green-Yellow was put in later.

Cooper: Yes

Schrag: I didn’t realize that

Cooper: It was a couple years later. It kept us working a long time, because of the two things.

Schrag: How did Metro Center work? Obviously when it opened, there was only the Red Line. Was it built as a cross to begin with?

Cooper: Yes. I have plain forgotten whether or not we built the cross-vault in the first station or not. I know we did it in the second station. With the first phase of Gallery Place or the second phase. I don’t remember. But it is, as you know, a cross-vault station.

Schrag: One question about Judiciary Square, in terms of fitting Metro into the urban context, it seems to me that’s the only station I can think of where you see something when you come up the escalator. That is, in the afternoon light, there’s the Pension Building, glowing. Did you hope that that would be true of other stations or was that just sort of a lucky opportunity?

Cooper: Yes and no. Yes, we hoped, and yes, it was a lucky opportunity. [laughter] But this idea didn’t work all around the city, the idea of coming up in the parks. You come up to nothing. And that’s OK, but it isn’t dramatic. And, of course, Harry had to modify this in the end, to make some of the stations work downtown. They come up inside buildings.

Schrag: Farragut, for example.

Cooper: Farragut, Dupont Circle, you could go on.

Schrag: So you think Farragut is more successful the way it is, than if you had had a transfer station in the middle of Farragut Square?

Cooper: Yes.

Schrag: Interesting. Years later, he said that was the great lost opportunity. I think Allan echoes that. It certainly would have cut some time for some routes. Did Metro have an impact on surface architecture? Did it improve the state of Washington? I'm not sure there is much good architecture on the surface of Washington. The East Wing I like a lot. The Martin Luther King Library is a disaster, acontextual. Did having these very lovely stations, modernist stations, underground, at all improve Washington's architecture above ground?

Cooper: I think that Dulles, and Metro, and Arena Stage, and Philip Johnson's thing, and East Wing, all have contributed to beginning to give Washington a modern, modernist at least, look. There aren't many great buildings in America, period. We've got our share of them. I think some are better than others. I wouldn't say it's a direct causal thing, but it's certainly part of a growth of an understanding of taking the architecture of the city, continuing to

take it seriously, but trying to invent—. The reason I am so outraged, one of the reason I am so outraged over the World War II Memorial, is that here we've got two modern memorials, down on the west end of the Mall, that really work contextually, and they work with each other. They tell different stories. My favorite still would be the Vietnam Memorial, because of its simplicity, but also its theme. The theme of the Korean Memorial is different. It's a more diffuse thing. We had to work with a different set. But I brought it so it's in harmony with the Vietnam Memorial, very intentionally. But to put a stupid, classical thing down at the other end, a throwback, is just absolutely terrible. I'm in active dialogue with Carter Brown about this. If I win, it's going to be a miracle. But I'm not going to give up. This is just stupid.

Schrag: This is a battle that has been going back since the 1930s.

Cooper: George Hartman is no help on this, I'll tell you. It's been going on, sure. And it will continue to go on.

Schrag: Was that Commission of Fine Arts of the 1960s an unusual moment in the CFA's history? One of the

themes of chapter 2 is that Kennedy appoints some very striking people to the NCTA. He takes a lot of the people who were the protestors in the Eisenhower administration, like Darwin Stolzenbach, and puts them in power. I'm wondering if he did the same thing to the CFA, and that was a sort of unusual moment for the CFA to be state of the art. Whereas in the 1930s, it was much more conservative, and maybe it is again.

Cooper: I think so. I don't know the entire—I don't carry this in my head. The Fine Arts Commission turned down the Jefferson Memorial outright. I think this was one of the things, the whole issue of style. This was back in 1940, or something like that. Roosevelt just said, the hell with you, I'm going to build it anyway. There's a long history of architectural review in Washington. It was stable for a long time, because of Burnham, and because of Charles Moore, who ran the Fine Arts Commission with an iron fist for years.

Schrag: I think I just have two questions. One is, since we were talking about the Vietnam and Korean memorials, would you draw any straight line between your experience on Metro and your work on those. Was there something about that? Or since we were talking

about concrete, Amazonia as well. These are well-known projects. Did Metro shape your career in any significant way?

Cooper: Probably not as much as it might have. Dulles shaped it much more. I wasn’t really in on the conceptualization of the final design of the thing. I was in on the envisioning of the overall architectural system, and the refining of the conceptual design that Harry did. On Dulles I was really in on the concept development of the whole thing. I think that on a personal level, the thing that I have been noticing about myself, was I had been very concerned about what was going on in the city for some time. I am a trustee of the Committee of 100. I work very actively in urban design. I couldn’t get my practice moved in that direction. We tried very hard to do that. But we were not successful at getting a couple of key jobs that we were finalists on, that would have made a terrific to us. We were frozen out of continuing to work on Metro stations because we’re white, and because WMATA had to meet affirmative action standards, and they were scared to death to hire black engineering firms because they didn’t think they had enough experience. But they felt they could hire black

architects because they could control them easier, and that's what they did. We were just no longer—

Schrag: Would that have been interesting, to do the rest of the system?

Cooper: There were a lot of spots where we could have made a contribution. But it's true, not as much. But we would have kept a force going on this. We would have had some role. I don't have any big thing about Metro. I think I made a contribution at a key point in it, and I'm very happy for having done that. I think that the Weese people really had a terrible thing. The one who really is important here is Stan Allan. Without Stan, Harry would have been absolutely lost. He would have been lost.

Schrag: What do you mean, exactly?

Cooper: Harry never really became a transportation person. He still is restoring great auditoriums and doing that sort of thing. That's where his heart was. Stan really got into putting together an office that was really into modern, urban transportation. Stan is not a designer, but he is certainly a conceptualist. He is an organizer, and a marketer. He single-handedly kept them here in Washington in a pivotal role throughout the entire system. No one else could

have done that. It was a very difficult thing to do. I take my hat off to him. It's the reason I was so happy to participate in this effort. [*For the Glory of Washington.*] I felt that while he was alive, this story needed to get told, and he was just the right one to tell it.

Schrag: I don't want to end on too much of a down note, but it does seem striking to me that the prototype idea for a subway has not been picked up, at least not in cities that I'm aware of. It's not in Los Angeles—they're going with palm trees here and dinosaurs there. I don't know what Singapore looks like. I haven't been there.

Cooper: It would be more apt to be in Singapore at any rate. [laughter]

Schrag: That's what I was wondering. I want to qualify the statement, because I haven't seen any pictures. And Stan Allan says he thinks it's state of the art. In terms of rider experience, it's Singapore. Clean and efficient and quiet and everything else. Do you think that prototype model would be applicable to other transit systems if it were to be in other cities, or is it a particularly Washington idea?

Cooper: I think it was a good Washington idea. The mobile lounge, which is a prototypical system, hasn't been used other places. Dulles turned out to be — We thought that the mobile lounge system was what was going to be significant about Dulles. The terminal building turned out to be significant. The mobile lounge didn't. The first day I came down here to Washington, to start the design of Dulles, we had a meeting with the Airlines Pilots Association. They said, we want you all to know, because this is the first intercontinental, jet airport that is going to be designed, that we will never taxi a jet airplane within 100 feet of any building, because of the unreliability of the jet engine. [laughter] That's what led us to the mobile lounge concept.

The mobile lounge will be a dinosaur, and in ten years it won't be at Dulles anymore. I tried to get the job to do the replacement of it. We just didn't have the clout that Skidmore does, to get the job. I'm afraid that they're not going to do the right thing. I think that that terminal building is flexible enough that it could have been adapted to the subway system quite beautifully. But it won't be. Because they don't have the guts to really do it. But I think that in the end, Dulles, in addition

to being a good piece of architecture, is the thing that led to Atlanta. Because if you look at the two from the air, they are identical. Except the subway runs underground, and the mobile lounges are intermittent. But the layout's identical. So Dulles was the prototype for the modern airport today, but not in the way we thought it was.

So maybe this is going to be a prototype in a way we yet don't understand. About the control of advertising, because that's one of the key problems in our society today: commercialism, let's face it. The idea of repetitiousness of form and repetitiousness of patterns. I don't know. I haven't thought about this and I don't really have an answer. But I do think that sometimes the things that you don't quite see that are happening at the time have hidden meanings that only emerge a little bit later. And maybe that will be the case here.

Schrag: Thank you very much. On that note—

Cooper: You are very welcome.

Schrag: This has been wonderful. I will stop the tape now.

[end]